

Beginning Farmer Center

ISU Extension to Agriculture and Natural Resources
College of Agriculture

Resources to help our next generation of farmers

Objectives

The Beginning Farmer Center (BFC) was established at Iowa State University (ISU) by the 1994 Iowa General Assembly. Objectives of the Center include:

- coordinating educational programs and services for beginning farmers,
- assessing needs of beginning and retiring farmers to identify opportunities for programs and services, and
- developing statewide programs to educate beginning and retiring farm families.

Organization

The Center is a joint effort of the ISU College of Agriculture Experiment Station and ISU Extension which delivers the Center's programs and activities.

The ISU Department of Economics provides a professor-in-charge for the Center, and the Center's administrator is the attorney for the Iowa Concern Hotline. A full-time associate and 13 associates throughout the state provide services on an as-needed basis.

Major Activities

FarmOn

The Center provides basic funding and outreach for the FarmOn program, which is designed to facilitate the introduction of retiring farmers to young people who want to get started in agriculture. To provide opportunities for potential participants, BFC hosts one-day workshops about issues related to farm transitions throughout Iowa.

FarmOn's files contain data on 870 potential beginning farmers and 220 landowners. To date, 98 matches have been made. During 2004 there were 353 FarmOn inquiries and 574 calls concerning other agriculture-related issues. The FarmOn calls consisted of 126 calls from beginning farmers, 158 calls from retiring farmers, and 69 general calls. There were five matches facilitated during the year.

The Center works closely with ISU Extension county and field staff to identify the needs of beginning and exiting farmers. The Center develops appropriate educational material and provides instructors for a series of seminars.

Ag Link

Ag Link is a two-day seminar for college juniors and seniors who plan to join their family farm operation after graduation. Family members and others in the operation also attend the seminar. Topics include conflict resolution, goal setting, determining values, business analysis, farm planning, and management. The 2004 seminars were attended by 38 people including 12 students, 19 parents, and three grandparents. Eight students have registered for two hours of independent study credit. The seminars also were attended by faculty from the University of Wisconsin who are interested in replicating the Ag Link seminar program in their state. The Center also provided guidance to Texas A&M University in the replication of the Ag Link seminars by that institution.

Individual farm analysis

The Center provides individual analysis of existing farm situations. During 2004 there were 25 farm visits reaching nearly 90 individuals.

Beginning Farmer Network

The Center administrator is the faculty advisor for an ISU student organization, the Beginning Farmer Network. Members of this group are interested in entering farming.

Conferences

The Center's administrator and the professor-in-charge spoke at numerous conferences nationally and internationally. Presentations were made to commodity groups, lawyers, farmers, government officials and others interested in beginning and retiring farmer issues.

The Center cosponsored an October 2004 conference on alternative swine production research which focused on the use of hoop houses for swine production. Hoop-based swine production offers a viable, low-cost production alternative for beginning farmers.

Late in 2004 the BFC met with student leaders at Iowa State to determine whether there was interest in having a conference focusing on the needs of beginning farmers. The initial meetings were positive and the idea will be pursued further in 2005.

BFC on the World Wide Web

The Center maintained and upgraded its web site in 2004. From this site, potential clients have access to selected publications and application forms for the FarmOn program. The Center also maintains a site for the National Farm Transition Network.

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Research activities

During 2004 the Center continued its ongoing work on farm succession planning. This includes a joint project with the University of Tennessee that examines the impact of alternative farm definitions.

In 2004 the Center began a three-phase research project that is a joint effort with ISU Extension and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The first phase of the project examined the familiarity of ISU Extension field staff with existing beginning farmer programs. The second phase assessed the extent and nature of programs offered by other groups and entities. The third phase, which is still underway, is working to develop alternative educational materials for beginning farmers.

The Center has begun research on farmer's attitudes regarding retirement. The research will be qualitative and will be a series of interviews of farmers. Those interviewed will be selected from the major types of farm operations including dairy, beef, commodity and swine.

Leveraging the Advantages

The FarmOn program and the Beginning Farmer Center are among the first in the nation to address the critical issue of future caretakers of farmland and successful ways to transfer operations to succeeding generations.

The BFC works closely with the Drake University Agricultural Law Center by providing speakers and materials. The Center also employs law students part-time as back-up for the Center's

Future Activities

The current financial situation in agriculture makes long-term planning especially critical. The Center continues to encourage farmers to realistically assess their viable options and alternatives. Value-added agriculture and local food systems are two of the potential revenue sources that need to be pursued by beginning farmers.

The Center, in conjunction with the Leopold Center and ISU Extension, is working on updating a series of publications for beginning farmers.

The Center is continuing to interpret the results of the first two phases of surveys done in 2004 and will use them to help provide better services for both beginning and retiring farmers. Additional research is planned to clarify and expand the results of the original surveys.

The Center will continue funding and support for the FarmOn and Ag Link programs. It also will continue to support the individual farm financial analysis for beginning farmers through ISU Extension's Farm Financial Planning Program.

The Center continues using the data obtained from the farm succession, small business surveys, and other research to develop a series of agricultural policy recommendations and educational materials.

The Center will continue looking at how to understand and increase the motivation for farmers to pass on an operation to

Another project was a fiscal analysis of the Center's proposal to offer tax relief for existing farmers who assist beginning farmers. This project, funded by the Leopold Center, has been recommended by the Center for a number of years and was conducted at the request of a consortium of producer groups. Their intention is to take a full proposal related to such tax relief to the Iowa Legislature this session.

Regional and national activities

The Center's professor-in-charge and administrator made presentations on the BFC at midwestern, national and international events. The administrator also coordinates the National Farm Transition Network, a network of various state, university, and private organizations that helps beginning farmers. This network allows groups to share ideas and materials, and avoid duplication of efforts.

The Center has become a source of information for many different groups around the country. Center materials were provided to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the Farm Futures Report. Materials also have been given to many different states through the National Farm Transition Network.

administrator and these activities serve as credit internships for the students. The Center works in conjunction with ISU Extension field staff to offer materials, speakers, and financial support for programs to help beginning and exiting farmers. The BFC also provides speakers and materials for the Iowa Bar Association and works closely on program efforts within several ISU academic departments.

another person as a unit rather than in pieces. Research also is needed to develop and analyze alternative business strategies for both beginning and retiring farmers.

Recommendations

Iowa must continue and increase its support for beginning farmers and those wishing to transition farmland to a young owner. Hopefully, the tax relief proposal for retiring farmers will be presented as a bill and be seriously considered by the state's lawmakers.

For more information, contact Michael D. Duffy, professor-in-charge, ISU Department of Economics, (515) 294-6160; or John Baker, BFC administrator, at (toll-free) 1-800-447-1985. The Beginning Farmer Center web site can be found at: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/bfc/>

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